

Experimental Treatment by jackwabbit

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Summary: Ficlet. Family. Dad Hopper. Eleven. Joyce & Hop are besties - I think. Spoilers: Stranger Things, Season Two. Summary: They said it was experimental. To Jim Hopper, that meant both next to nothing and a whole lot of something.

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Time Frame: About four years after Season Two.

Spoilers: Stranger Things, Season Two.

Summary: They said it was experimental. To Jim Hopper, that meant both next to nothing and a whole lot of something.

Joyce reached out and took his hand.

"It's her choice," she said.

Hopper nodded gravely. "I know," he rumbled. "Still..."

"You wish she wouldn't?"

"I don't know, it's just..."

Joyce continued to hold his hand with one of hers as she patted it with her other. She waited him out, just sitting there and saying nothing.

Her patience paid off eventually.

Hopper sighed.

"It's not even the hospital part. I mean, it is, but..."

He trailed off again and Joyce swallowed thickly. She knew Jim hated hospitals - and for good reason. But he never volunteered that. The fact that he was openly talking about them now meant that really wasn't the issue. He'd have clammed up real fast if it was.

After a moment, Hopper continued.

"It's not the drive, either. I don't mind it. Really. I've done it before."

Joyce nodded. He had. Many times. Boston wasn't much farther than New York. But still she said nothing, and again he continued after a long pause.

"And it's not the money. It's just... It may not work. I don't want her to get her hopes up. It's... It's experimental."

Joyce drew in a deep breath, then let it out. So there it was. She didn't know everything that had happened with Sara, but she knew enough. She knew that Jim and Diane had tried everything. It wasn't a stretch to imagine experimental treatment. That had failed. Or maybe made things worse.

And when she considered everything that had happened at the lab, she understood his hesitation more than most. But this was different.

Joyce steeled herself and finally spoke.

"Jim."

His head jerked up and he looked directly in her eyes. She rarely called him by his first name, even now, and when she did, it usually commanded his full attention. Today was no exception. Since that had been Joyce's intent, she continued.

"This isn't like that."

Hopper nodded. "I know."

"Do you?"

"Yeah," said Hopper with a sigh.

Joyce just raised an eyebrow at him until he sighed again and ran his free hand through his graying hair.

"I really do. I get that this is totally different. But what if there's scarring?"

"It's still her choice. And what's worse?"

Hopper shrugged. "It's a tough call."

Joyce have him an incredulous look.

"Not really," she said. "Lots of people have scars."

"That's true," Hopper conceded. "Guess I didn't think of it that way."

Joyce looked at him earnestly and made her point once again.

"It's her choice."

"She still needs my approval."

"Only for another year."

Jim sighed and took his hand back. Then he stood and left the room without another word.

Two months later, he sat next to his daughter while a doctor prepared supplies on a small tray.

They weren't sure this was going to work. They'd explained that time and again. No guarantees. It was experimental, after all.

But everything had been signed and approved and finally, here they were.

"You ready?" asked the doctor, looking at his patient.

She swallowed thickly and looked at Hopper. He met her eyes and gave her the slightest nod. She licked her lips, then took a deep breath.

"Ready," she said.

The doctor grabbed a wicked-looking device and moved it toward her arm.

She reached out toward Hopper with her other hand. As she did, he noted a tremor in her arm. If she noticed that it matched his own as he took her hand in his, she didn't say anything.

"You ok?" he whispered.

She nodded but squished her eyes shut.

"Papa," she said, so quiet it was barely audible.

Hopper tightened his grip, well aware she wasn't referring to him.

The doctor paused. "Everything ok?"

Both the patient and the father nodded.

"Do it," Jim muttered through his teeth.

The doctor started.

No one said another word.

But it had been a long time since Jane Hopper had held her father's hand, clinging to it like a small child.

And she'd never called him Papa. Not like that, anyway. Not since the occasional adolescent outburst that neither one of them cared to remember.

So while the doctor did his work, Hopper thought of books and hair ties and snow angels, while Jane remembered haircuts and water tanks and white cats.

And when it was all said and done, months later and after a few more trips, she did have a scar.

But it was just a scar.

It wasn't a number, marking her like cattle. A number she'd left behind long ago, despite the fact that her name was only Jane on paper.

It was just a scar.

And really, what was one more?

A/N: One of the first papers documenting laser tattoo removal in the United States was published by Massachusetts General Hospital

(Boston, Massachusetts) in 1990. The procedure wasn't as good as it is now and scarring was more common. And I figure the research and clinical trials leading up to this were done for at least a few years beforehand. I'm therefore placing this in 1988, when Eleven would be seventeen, using the creative license I got out of a Cracker Jack box in 1982.